

My First Spring Cleaning

BY

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TORONTO
WARWICK BRO'S & RUTTER, Limited
1906

PR 6037
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DEPOSITED NO. 17149

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By ALICE E. SAMPSON

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

WHEN I first met Jack Halliday at Middlesbro', where he had come on business during the summer of 1899, his little daughter Marjory had then been motherless some four years. Shortly afterwards he and I became engaged, and were married when the New Year was barely a month old. We had decided to go straight to Stowminster, in the West of England, where Jack lived, partly because of the season of the year, but chiefly because of the difficulty it would have been to him to leave his business just then for any length of time.

The day we travelled to my new home was a foggy and depressing one as far as the weather went, and, as we neared the end of our long journey, even Jack's gaiety seemed infected by the dreariness of the outside world, and his heart misgave him as to my first impressions. How often since we have laughed together over them!

"I say, little woman," he said, "they'll have done their best, I feel sure; but it isn't as if I had any womenkind of my own to see to things. So you won't feel down if you don't find everything ship-shape or in Yorkshire apple-pie order, eh?"

I quickly reassured him on this point, and shortly afterwards the train steamed into Stowminster, and in less than a quarter of an hour we were really "at home."

The Hallidays, who were the owners of a large tannery on the outskirts of Stowminster, had for generations lived, father and son, at the Vinery, a long, low double-fronted house which stood at the top of the quaint steep High Street. The whole building was covered with the enormous and ancient vine to which it owed its name.

Long afterwards I tried to recall what I really felt as I first looked round. I know it required a strong effort to conceal from Jack at the time how my heart sank at the sight of the dust and general air of disorder and neglect which prevailed, but he, dear old boy, was, I knew, watching me anxiously, so I managed to smile outwardly, while I inwardly comforted myself with the resolve that before many days had passed the new order of things should be inaugurated by a Yorkshire "thorough cleaning."

Fortunately for my plans, Jack's cherished working house-keeper had given him notice on hearing of his approaching marriage, and I had the good luck to secure two sisters, bright, hard-working Yorkshire girls, who had been in my Sunday School class for many years, and who were willing to come down to Stowminster to me as soon as I required them. Annie was to be cook-general, and Matilda housemaid-waitress.

They arrived during the next week, and I hoped to speedily set to work, but alas, for the best-laid schemes of mice and men, the delicate little Marjory, who had not been well when we arrived, developed acute pneumonia, and the anxious weeks slowly lengthened into months before she was pronounced really out of danger,

and I was able to take her down to Bournemouth, where Jack's elder sister, Evelyn, had a home for invalids close to the lovely Boscombe pine-woods. Here I left the child with an easy mind, and returned home to begin in real earnest my long deferred spring-cleaning, now more than ever needed.

PREPARATIONS.

The two days after my return I spent in going into stores and making a complete list of the household requisites which would be required during our cleaning down.

In Stowminster we were rather fortunate in having a branch shop of one of the large London co-operative stores, and here everything needed in a house could be obtained at most moderate prices. I supplied myself with a Ewbank sweeper, which cost 12s. 6d. This seemed a good deal, but I knew from experience that it would last quite six times as long as an ordinary carpet broom, for which I would have to pay 3s. to 3s. 6d. I next got a stair and banister brush, one made with a whick on one side and hair on the other, the two meeting so that the wooden end of the brush is covered and does not damage the paint on the staircase. The price of this was 2s. 9d. I chose also a double-ended brush, which served for both walls and ceilings. This was made with a twelve-foot brass-jointed handle and cost 7s. 6d. A curtain broom at 1s. 11d., a furniture brush at 2s. 6d.—with soft bristles, as hard bristles scratch and tear the furniture—a set of blacklead brushes at 2s. 6d., a set of scrubbing brushes at 3s. 6d., and a housemaid's box with a movable tray, costing 3s. 6d., completed my purchases in this department. I laid in also a good supply of carbolic and household soap, soft soap, soap powder, soda, turpentine, household ammonia, metal polish and blacklead. Furniture cream I did not buy ready for use, as I preferred to make it myself from a very old recipe long followed in my mother's family. The ingredients I needed for it were one ounce of beeswax, half an ounce of white wax, one ounce of Castile soap, one gill of turpentine, one gill of boiling water. I first of all shred the wax finely and dissolved it in the turpentine. Then I shred the soap into the gill of boiling water, and added them both, while boiling to the other ingredients. I then beat all together for half an hour, until the mixture was quite cold and of a creamy consistency. It is rather tiring to do this thoroughly, but it is labour well expended, for I have never yet found any boughten cream which produced so good a result afterwards.

My mother, who was at notable housekeeper even in a county which is famous for good housewives, used to impress upon us girls, when we were growing up at home, these three things: First, that spring-cleaning was a necessary evil in every household, but that the extent to which it became a nuisance depended entirely on the manner in which it was carried out. Secondly, that if a system were decided upon beforehand and rigidly adhered to, everything would be comparatively plain sailing; and, thirdly, that a haphazard way of commencing in one room, and then going to another before the first is finished, must, above all things, be avoided, or spring-cleaning would be indeed become a reign of terror.

Another unwritten rule of mother's was that at least one good substantial meal must be partaken of every day while the work went on. She entirely deprecated yielding to the temptation of having only cups of tea and cold scraps, in order to "save time." The inevitable result was, she said, that tempers suffered, even if the work got on, and I resolved in this particular certainly to follow her advice, for I know how even the best of servants are apt to err in this way.

In a modest establishment like ours, with only two hands, it is usual to temporarily obtain extra help, but I was reluctant to do this for several reasons, the chiefest being that, apart from the hours that she spends over "odd jobs," the help from outside invariably contrives to upset the equanimity of even the most devoted maids, and if they do not give you notice when the cleaning is over, they are sure to be at loggerheads with each other, so that the result in the long run is the same.

I thought it only fair, though, to consult with my two girls, Matilda and Annie, before I finally decided, and, to my great relief, I found they were quite as averse to having anyone in as I was. I resolved mentally that they should not be losers by this decision.

CHAPTER II.

THE ATTICS.

ON Monday morning we began work at the top of the house, intending to work downwards, and do the hall last of all.

Now the top of the house at the Vinery consisted of five attic rooms, shut off from the bedroom floor by a door which opened on to a steep staircase of worm-eaten oak. Up to now apparently, the whole of this floor had only been used for lumber, but as the rooms were all of good size, well lighted by dormer windows, and three out of the five had fireplaces, I determined to use two as bedrooms for the servants, one as a workroom for myself and a playroom for Marjory, while the other two could be utilized, one as a boxroom and the other as a storeroom for linen, blankets, etc. My first work, with the aid of the maids, was to destroy the mass of useless odds and ends which had accumulated during the past four years. The plan which seemed to have been adopted by the working housekeeper was simply to thrust up here anything she wanted to get rid of from downstairs. Much that we went over was of no possible use except to harbour dust and moth, but quite an imposing heap of left-off clothes, broken furniture and such-like things, was sorted out for the next rummage sale at the parish church, which, I learned, always took place here on the Tuesday in Whit week.

The floors up here, in common with the rest of the house, were of oak, black with age, and the ceilings had heavy beams of the same. The walls at some far-off period had been papered. This I had stripped off, and, with the exception of the workroom, which was re-hung with a nursery rhyme paper for Marjory's benefit, had them all distempered in a pleasant shade of green. In case of infectious illness appearing in a house, it is always a good plan to have one set of rooms without paper. All the woodwork was

first well scrubbed with carbolic soap, and, when quite dry, treated with this mixture.

In two quarts of beer we boiled a piece of beeswax about as large as a walnut, and added a heaped tablespoonful of Demerara sugar. When both were dissolved and the liquid well mixed, it was applied to the oak with a large brush, and, when dry, polished with dusters and old rags. The same method was followed with all the woodwork throughout the house, and the effect was surprising.

I allowed the maids to choose the two rooms they preferred, as a little consideration of this sort gives great pleasure, I always found. Those they selected, though not the largest, were sunny and pleasant. The furniture in both consisted of an iron bedstead and spring mattress combined. The wirework was covered with fresh sheets of strong brown paper to prevent its marking the mattress, which, with the bolster and pillows, was of flock. A chest of drawers, with a toilet glass on it, while in a good light, was placed so that the window could readily be opened. A washstand, with towel-rail at the side, a small table for books or little personal belongings, a stand for hanging dresses, a strip of bedside carpet, a fender and small fireguard completed the arrangements, with which the girls seemed much pleased. Their trunks were put in the boxroom out of the way.

The storeroom already had in it some deep presses suitable for holding linen. I had them all scrubbed out with carbolic soap, and well dried, while, as a precaution against moths, the inside of the one intended for the blankets was painted with cedar oil. Painting with turpentine is also a good safeguard against these invaders, but the smell is not quite so pleasant. Later on in the year I intended to lay lavender bags in my linen-press.

When the workroom was ready, I had moved into it a deep chest of drawers for patterns, etc., a box-ottoman for unfinished work, a setady table, large enough to cut out on comfortably, a cupboard for Marjory's toys, a rug or two, a basket chair, two cane-seated chairs, and last, but not least, my sewing machine. This also had received a good cleaning at the hands of the energetic Matilda, who had first oiled it well with paraffin, and then worked it completely out of the machine before applying the prepared oil in the usual way. Paraffin is excellent for cleansing a machine if it works at all heavily, but it must on no account be allowed to remain on it, as the friction would quickly wear away the delicate fittings.

While turning out the room intended for a box-room, I found one old chest packed with a service of early Staffordshire ware almost complete, besides a number of quaint china ornaments of the same period. They had evidently not been touched for years, and Jack, when I asked 'em about them, said he just remembered his grandmother packing 'em away when he was a very little boy, because she thought them "ugly." They had laid there forgotten until now, but I rejoiced exceedingly at the recovery of such treasure-trove for my drawing-room. I washed them most carefully myself in warm water, in which I put some soap powder, using a tooth-brush to get into the curves of the cup handles and crannies of the ornaments. When they were well polished with

a soft cloth, they were a collection which would fill any other china lover with envy and all uncharitableness.

Wednesday evening about six o'clock found me closing the door at the bottom of the attic stairs with the pleasant reflection that here at least nothing further remained to be done.

THE BATHROOM AND BEDROOMS.

Jack's usual time for leaving the works was five o'clock. The dog-cart was sent from the Vinery for him at half past four, and he generally reached home about an hour later. But the gods were good to me just now, for his manager was away, and this obliged Jack to stay at the office until six or a quarter past, so that he did not get into the house much before seven o'clock, our usual dinner hour. By that time we were quite ready for him, for nothing is more irritating to a man when he comes home tired than to be met almost at the threshold by the evidences of a domestic upheaval. My hub was really one of the easiest people in the world to please, and offered no objection to having tea and soup cut out of his menu for the time being. I had arranged with Annie that, during the house-cleaning, one hot joint, varied by a good hot-pot or beefsteak and kidney pie, would do for dinner, as any of these, with the vegetables, could be easily prepared over night, and would not require over-much attention next day. We substituted stewed fruit and cream for a made sweet. I just mention this to show that we were able to get an uninterrupted time for work from say nine o'clock—we breakfasted at eight—until half past five or six o'clock every day, and by that time we were all ready to leave off.

On Thursday morning our operations began at the bathroom. When the bath was first put in, Jack had had this room tiled, so that the cleaning of it was comparatively simple. The walls were first washed with soap and water, well dried, and then rubbed with a flannel dipped in linseed oil. Some people, I know, use milk and water to polish with, and others olive oil, but I always find that pure linseed oil is best. The bath itself required repainting with prepared enamel, but as this is not always satisfactory when done by an amateur, I arranged with the workmen who were painting the hall to do the bath as well. When it was dry, there only remained for us to clean and polish the brass fittings. For the present we left these smeared with powdered rotten-stone and oil, before finally polishing them with a leather or Selvyt duster.

The black oak panelling of our house tended to make it somewhat dark, so we decided to have the hall and all the staircases and passages throughout the house painted ivory white with a bold frieze in a rich red. This made an astonishing difference in the effect when it was all finished, and, as the paint was of the kind known as enamel paint, or porcelaine, the smooth, glossy surface after it was dry, made it quite an easy matter to keep it in order. The unpleasant smell of the new paint was quickly got rid of by leaving hay sprinkled with a little chloride of lime lying about for a few hours.

The bedrooms, five in number, were all treated in the same way. Pictures and ornaments were all taken down, cleaned, covered over and laid aside until the room was ready for them again. The mattresses and bedding, after being first thoroughly brushed

and beaten to remove as much dust as possible, were then put out into the sun. Three of the bedsteads were old-fashioned wooden ones, and these were sponged with a solution of hot alum-water. The iron ones were wiped all over with a cloth damped with paraffin. As soon as the oil dries the smell disappears. The lacquered brass ornaments of the iron bedsteads were cleaned by being washed with lukewarm soap-suds, and then rubbed gently with a wash-leather.

Next the contents of the wardrobes were brushed, shaken and put out to air. All the drawers had fresh paper laid into them, and the dust was removed from the crevices before they were replaced. Most of the furniture was very old mahogany. We first washed it thoroughly with vinegar, and then this polish, which is unequalled for renewing the colour, was applied. Into one pint of linseed oil I put four pennyworth of alkanet root and two pennyworth of rose pink. I let this mixture steep all night in an earthenware jar. Before using it in the morning, I stirred it well, and then rubbed the furniture all over with a rag dipped in it. After letting it remain on for two hours, I rubbed it bright with old linen rags and dusters.

A panel of one of the wardrobes had by some accident been badly indented. To remove these marks, we wetted the indented place well with warm water, and then covered the bruises with five or six folds of brown-paper that had been well soaked in water. We then placed a hot flat-iron to the paper until all the moisture had evaporated, and repeated the operation until the surface was level. The cane-seated chairs were cleaned by washing them with half a pail of hot water, into which the juice of two lemons had been squeezed. After they had been dried in the sun, the cane was quite stiff and taut again. The curtains of each room were well brushed and shaken, and afterwards carefully folded. Each chimney was swept in turn by a reliable man. The ceilings and walls of each room were then swept, and the grates were polished with ordinary blacklead, rubbed on with a soft brush, and removed with the "elbow polish" of a vigorous Yorkshire arm.

The oak floors made it unnecessary to have large or very heavy carpets, and those in the bedroom were just bordered squares of good Brussels. Jack sent up one of the men from the tan-yard to beat them at home. He stretched each square across a stout clothes-line, leaving the ends just clear of the ground. When as much dust as possible had been removed, the carpet was laid on the ground, sprinkled thoroughly with fresh, slightly damped tea-leaves and well swept, care being taken to keep the brush always moving in one direction. Two of the bedrooms had a strong morning sun, and the carpets had become faded. To revive the colours I had them sprinkled with salt, slightly damped on the surface, and then brushed with a soft carpet-broom. The man who beat the carpets helped the maids to re-lay them, as well as to replace the heavier pieces of furniture in each room.

The looking-glasses were all cleaned with methylated spirit applied with a sponge, and a dust of the finest sifted whitening. This was rubbed off with a clean linen rag, and the surface of the mirrors was finally polished with an old silk handkerchief.

All the mantelpieces in the house were quaint carved oak, but in the guest chamber the same Philistine grandmother who ban-

ished the Staffordshire crockery to the attic had caused to be placed a really awful structure of Sicilian marble, with yellowish streaks, quite out of keeping with the old-fashioned room. I decided, as soon as I had time again for a little needlework, to hide its ugliness as far as possible by a sort of drapery I had often seen used for this purpose in France, where I had been at school. This drapery is nothing more or less than a strip of hem-stitched linen, placed so as to hang down a foot or so in front, and as much or more at the ends. Ruskin or Harris linen, embroidered in coloured flax threads, lends itself most amiably to this form of drapery, and is at once fresh, dainty and very clean. In my mind my design already took form: rose-pink tulips on a green ground would, I saw, harmonise with the furnishing of the room.

I set my heart on having Marjory's little room, which opened out of ours, entirely re-decorated, and Jack gave me leave to do whatever I liked with it. The paper I chose for it had a white ground, with sprays of pink rosebuds and foliage trailing over it. In the chintz curtains the same design was repeated. I had the furniture painted ivory white, and on her little bed I put an eider-down quilt of rose-pink with a deep fringe of apple-green. The large rug in front of the fireplace reaching well into the middle of the room, was also in tones of pink and green. Over the bed I hung a picture of the Good Shepherd, and over the mantel-shelf a miniature of her own lovely young mother, who died at Nice—where she had spent all her short married life—when Marjory was born. It all looked most charming when it was finished, and I looked forward eagerly to the child's delight when she first saw it.

CHAPTER III.

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

THERE still remained to be done the dining-room, drawing-room, Jack's "den" and the kitchens. The hall, too, meant practically another room. It was large and square, with a great open fireplace and inglenook—an ideal place for afternoon tea, as in summer, being dark and shady, it would be a cool retreat, and in winter nothing could be more delightful than to sit there, close to a fire of brightly burning logs which send a pleasant glow over walls and furniture. I pictured to myself just how cosy it would be!

The drawing-room, to which we next turned our attention, opened off the hall on the right-hand side. It was a long and rather narrow room, with leaded casement windows opening out on the garden and giving a charming view of the lovely Stow valley. The wall-paper was an old-fashioned one, but very good of its kind. The pattern was gilt stars on a white ground. I rather liked the effect of it, though—it seemed to suit the old-world room. Some very good water-colours, framed in the narrow gilt frames of the early Victorian period to which they belonged, were hung around at regular intervals. I could see, mentally, that a little re-arrangement, and less uniformity in re-hanging them, would be an immense improvement.

Over the mantelpiece was a tall, rather narrow antique mirror, in a wide flat mahogany frame ornamented with gilt Tudor roses. There was a low bookcase on one side of the fireplace, and two really beautiful Chippendale cabinets, the one containing specimens of china from almost every English pottery of note, and the other a wonderful collection of old ivory brought from abroad by some far-away Halliday. The writing-bureau, chairs and card-table, (which made a half circle when closed) were Chippendale, and the grand piano was of polished rosewood.

The most modern thing in the room was the Chesterfield couch. It was covered—as were also the chairs—with fitted covers of a rosebud-patterned chintz relieved by love-knots in blue. The square of Wilton carpet was a design of brown and dull rose on a creamy ground, and with the silk window curtains had faded to a lovely shade of old rose.

We began by collecting all the ornaments and knick-knacks on trays and taking them into another room to be dusted and washed. I did this while the maids were cleaning out the room. The heavy pieces of furniture, such as the piano, cabinets and bookcase, were left in the room carefully covered with dust-sheets; all the lighter articles were removed into the hall.

Before beginning the cleaning of the room, the door was shut and the windows opened, a rule sometimes reversed by inexperienced housewives.

After the ceiling had been lightly brushed, we proceeded to clean the wall-paper in the following way. We first divided a number of white loaves, quite a week old, into convenient-sized pieces. Then we began at the top of the room (the low ceiling making it quite easy), and wiped lightly downwards, using the crust of the bread merely as a handle. The dirt and crumbs fell to the ground together. After going all round the upper part of the room once, we began again a little above the bottom of the strip already done, and proceeded in the same manner. We took great care not to wipe crosswise or upwards, and very lightly, so that the dirt was rubbed off, and not in.

While the girls polished the furniture with the cream I have mentioned before, I turned my attention to the pictures. I damped the surface of the glass with ammonia water and rubbed it with wash-leather, using an old silk handkerchief to polish with. Any stains in the glass I removed by sponging them with a mixture of salt dissolved in three times as much cold water. Some people use soapy water for this, but it is a great mistake, as it dulls the glass and gathers grease and dirt. The gilt picture-frames I rubbed gently with a little white of egg on a feather to remove all specks of dust and fly-marks. Two or three that were especially dirty I rubbed over with spirits of wine and then washed with soap. After replacing the glass and pictures, I fastened over the back of the frames, with seccotine, a strong piece of fresh brown paper to keep out the dust.

I cleaned some of the carved ivory figures which required it with a paste composed of damp sawdust and a few drops of lemon juice. This was laid on thickly and allowed to dry and then removed with a hard brush.

On returning to the drawing-room to dust and arrange the bookcase, I was just in time to prevent Annie from embarking on

some fine Benares flower-pots and tea-tray with ordinary metal-polish. I explained to her that this would have the effect of turning them black instead of restoring their own rich colour. I then got her to mix some ordinary whitening with water, to the consistency of London milk. It was then scrubbed into the pots and tray with a moderately hard brush, run clean under a tap, and wiped with a perfectly clean cloth. They were then set before the fire, and when very dry, polished with a clean chamois leather. This recipe, which was given to me by a lady who lived for many years in India, and who had many beautiful specimens of Benares work, I found to be excellent.

The loose covers of the drawing-room furniture I had sent to the steam laundry to be properly calendered, and these were therefore ready when we wanted to tie them on the last thing. I had previously gone through them to see that no strings were missing.

The room was lighted by wax candles, and the old Georgian silver candlesticks and sconces we washed in hot soapy water, a sponge, not a flannel, being used when any rubbing was required, and the soap lathered in the water, not rubbed on the silver. They were then dried quickly on a soft linen cloth, and a paste made with pure whitening mixed with spirits of wine was rubbed on with a piece of soft flannelette. When the whitening was dry, we brushed it off with a soft plate-brush, and gave the final polish with a fine dry wash-leather. I was careful to buy the best wash-leather for the plate. The cheap kinds used for window-cleaning are not suitable. I found, too, that the older the leather got, the better it polished.

The room looked the embodiment of daintiness when it was finished, and I felt the only thing it needed to make it quite perfect were bowls of flowers.

I intended to have a great many flowers about, when I used the room daily. That was one of the delightful possibilities of having a garden of one's own, especially after coming from a town where every flower had to be bought.

THE DINING-ROOM.

The dining room had been "restored" when Jack entered into possession of the Vinery, and he had exercised his excellent taste by furnishing it in a way, which was perfectly harmonious to the key-note struck by the old high mantelpiece of carved oak, and the oil paintings of his ancestors which hung upon the walls.

He had banished entirely the black horsehair seated furniture, and replaced it by oak made from a modification of a good Jacobean design. The chairs were solid and heavy, the seats covered with scarlet leather. The wall-paper was of a tapestry design with a frieze of conventional poppies, in much the scarlet of the chair seats. The carpet was a Turkey carpet in warm tones of red and green, and the curtains were of red embroidered Indian silk. It was a pleasant room, though whether a professional expert in dining-room "schemes" would honour it by pronouncing it "original" or "distinctive," I am unable to say. I think not, probably; it was too ordinary.

The carpet was beaten and folded by Roger—our handy man—the curtains shaken and put away until they were required, and

then after the heavy furniture had been covered and the pictures removed, we had the ceiling papered in a tinted Tyneside vellum paper. The mantelpiece, floor and oak skirting-board were then cleaned with the mixture of beer and beeswax, and when quite dry polished well.

The pictures, many of them valuable, were all treated in the same way.

The heavy gold frames were dusted with a light brush, then they were lightly washed with pure spirits of wine applied with a tuft of cotton wool and left to dry. The paintings themselves, I gently rubbed with an old silk handkerchief, or rather with one of a set of silk dusters which I had made from the breadths of an old foulard silk frock. Being fine and soft it answered admirably. One or two of the pictures had suffered from dust and smoke, so I sponged the surface with water to which a little ox-gall had been added, and afterwards with pure water, carefully removing all moisture with the silk duster.

I would not have attempted this, however, if the surface of the painting had been cracked at all, as it would have caused it to scale.

When rehanging the pictures, I was careful to have them all put in an upright position, as the tilting forward sometimes adopted is very unsightly. The only actual change I made in the furniture of the dining-room was to bring in from the hall, where it was not required, a fine old Welsh dresser. This had been placed in a recess opposite the fire-place, and, after it had been rubbed up, furnished with some old pewter platters and tankards. These had been lying by in a small pantry which led from the dining-room to the kitchen. It took some little time to get them bright. We first got them clean by rubbing them with a soft rag dipped in paraffin and whiting, and polished them finally as we did the silver.

The fender was rather a quaint one of pierced brass, and this was cleaned with finely powdered bath brick mixed with a little water. It was rubbed in with a soft cloth and the process completed by means of a plate-leather.

The small pantry off the dining-room was not sufficiently large to be useful as a butler's pantry, but as it was fitted with a broad shelf, deep drawers and hot and cold water, besides having a good light, I decided that in future it should be utilised for a lamp room.

Annie was a perfect treasure at doing the lamps, and took quite a pride in it. This was a decided relief to me, as few maids can be trusted to undertake this work satisfactorily. Here were put all the things she would require to use every morning. A collection of different sized wicks, a pair of lamp-scissors, a funnel, an old tray on which to stand the lamps while they were being filled, chimney brushes, a supply of oil in a metal drum, with a key tap, a filling can, and last, but not least, some strong vinegar, in which the new wicks were first soaked, and then thoroughly dried before being used. This we found prevented them from smoking.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "DEN."

FROM the pantry we passed on to Jack's "den," a nondescript sort of room, to reach which you had to go along a short passage and down three steps. It was papered in golden tan shades, with a frieze distemper in a deep shade of tan, stencilled in oak brown. The carpet was Brussels, a blue and brown mixture, and the chairs and couch were leather covered. Here Jack smoked, read, sometimes wrote a letter, and generally "lazed" a little.

I soon saw that my chief work would lie with the dwarf book-cases which ran around the sides of the room. Nor was I mistaken. It took me "quite a little time," as our American friends say, to remove the books, dust them one by one, and then polish the cases before re-arranging the contents.

Underneath the window stood a pedestal writing-table of fumed oak, solid and business-like, with a nest of drawers on each side. With great difficulty I had persuaded Jack to go through these drawers himself and get rid of sufficient of the contents to enable them at least to close! With many grumbles he at length consented, and I had the satisfaction of seeing them shut for the first time since I was introduced to the den. The inkstand was a heavy old bronze one, and while removing this to clean it, poor Matilda was so unfortunate as to jerk her arm, and upset the ink over one corner of the clean carpet which had just been laid down. She was much distressed about it, but by treating the stain at once in the following manner, you could scarcely tell in an hour or two that any accident had occurred. We first took up as much ink as possible with a teaspoon, and then washed the spot with sweet milk, using a sponge and not rubbing, but only dabbing softly. We applied very little moisture at a time and continued the process until the milk was barely tinted. We then washed the spot with cold water and dried it with a cloth.

The chairs and couch were well dusted, and then the furniture cream was rubbed into the leather until it had become quite absorbed, when the final brilliancy was given with a soft duster.

THE KITCHENS.

Annie and Matilda were most anxious for me to reach the kitchens, for during the weeks of Marjory's illness, when nothing in the shape of cleaning could be done in any other part of the house, they had expended all their energy in turning out and scrubbing every hole and corner, until, as Annie proudly remarked, "you could eat your dinner off the kitchen floor."

The said floor was laid with black and red tiles, and these had been scrubbed repeatedly with soap and water and polished with linseed oil until they quite justified Annie's pride in them. All kitchen utensils, whether in use or not, had been scoured. They told me that the porcelain-lined saucepans had been allowed to get into a very bad condition, and to restore them they had found necessary to fill them with boiling water in which a teaspoonful of powdered borax had been placed. The dish-covers and a handsome

old copper warming-pan (which I resolved at once to transplant to the hall) had been cleaned with paraffin and whitening until they were perfectly dazzling.

The stone steps leading down to the storeroom were, I was told, "a sight to be seen." They were brought back to spotlessness by first removing the grease by pouring hot water and soda over the spots, and covering them with a paste of fuller's earth and water, which was left on all night. In the morning this was removed, the steps scrubbed with very hot water and finished off with hearth-stone.

All the woodwork, as well as the tables, dressers, apple and vegetable bins, had been thoroughly scrubbed with a mixture composed of three parts of fine sand and one of lime. Annie had been too well trained to allow soap to touch unpainted wood. She knew that if it is used it fills the pores of the wood with a glutinous matter which retains any dirt that comes into contact with it.

There really remained nothing for me to do here, except to make with the help of the maids, an inventory of all the linen, glass, china and kitchen utensils. Each item was placed under its proper heading, so that breakages and replacements could be noted in it at the time they occurred. A book of this kind is easily compiled in the first place, and is very little trouble to post up, provided that the entries are made methodically and at the right time; and at home I knew that mother found the plan a wonderful deterrent from careless smashing. Both the girls asked that they might have a new clock for kitchen use, and I acceded at once, for I knew that if the cook has not a reliable time-keeper in the kitchen she could not be expected to be punctual. I intended to get a strong American clock of the portable kind, fitted with an alarm, and which they could take upstairs every night. The kind I thought of, cost about 6s. 11d. They can be got more cheaply than this, but a very cheap make of clock should be avoided. It is better to pay a higher price for one that can be depended upon. I gratified the maids greatly by my appreciation of their work in their own immediate premises, and it was with right good will that they set to work at the hall, the last portion of the house that remained to be done.

CONCLUSION.

The work in the hall consisted chiefly in rubbing and polishing the stairs, floor, dado and furniture. This was done after the traces left behind by the workmen had been scrubbed off. Now, rubbing oak for several hours at a time is somewhat monotonous work, but it is labour well repaid in the end. In one corner of the hall was a deep shelved cupboard, and crammed into this, with a lot of useless rubbish, were six old tinted engravings—"London Street-cries"—framed in deep frames of rosewood. They were polished up and hung, rather low, on both sides of the hall. Just behind the ingle-nook stood a dignified grandfather clock, whose shining brass dial bore the date 1719. At the opposite corner I hung the warming-pan which I had retrieved from the kitchen. A monk's seat, a dawry chest and an old settle completed the original furniture of the hall. As we intended to use it for tea on most days, I added some well-made basket-chairs, some bright

oriental rugs for the floor, and a really good screen of Japanese make, in black and gold, which would serve to shut out any possible draughts from the kitchens. A narrow oak shelf ran along the panelling, and on this, between the spaces left by the engravings, I put some specimens of blue Delft and old Lowestoft ware. Each article shone again, and the whole atmosphere had that pleasant scent of turpentine, beeswax and polishing cream which speaks eloquently of perfect cleanliness.

The cleaning had taken exactly sixteen days exclusive, of course, of the Sundays; we finished on the Thursday afternoon. Oh, how tired I was! Every muscle in my body seemed to ache. But I took a very hot bath in which I put three tablespoonfuls of household ammonia, and after a good night's rest felt none the worse for my exertions.

Evelyn was to spend Whitsuntide with us, and we expected her to arrive by the four o'clock train on Saturday, bringing Marjory with her. Jack went down to the station to meet them, while I remained to have tea ready for them directly they came. While I waited, I looked round with pleasure at the pretty scene. May though it was, the air was chilly enough to make the brightly burning wood-fire pleasant. Great bowls of hawthorn and lilac scented the air. Drawn up by the fire was the shining tea-table, and I saw that Annie had made at least six different kinds of little cake, including her famous cream griddle-cakes.

Just as Matilda brought in the hissing tea-kettle, the travellers arrived. Marjory looking the picture of health bounded in, and flung herself upon me for "a great big hug." Then she looked round her curiously, skipped into the dining-room, opened the drawing-room door, and finally returned to us.

"Oh, daddy," she cried, "how shiny our house looks! And how lovely it smells! It is like—what is it like, Aunt Evie?"

Before Evelyn could answer, she went on triumphantly, "I know, I know, all by myself. It is like the woods by your house!"

"Well done, little one," said Jack delightedly, "you could not have done better," and then he turned to me with a twinkle in his eye, "After such unsolicited testimony as that, Kitty, you need not any longer hesitate to ask all Yorkshire down if necessary!"

[THE END]